



Miami VA Healthcare System TROPICAL TOPICS

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Wounded Soldiers Cycling Across America Visit Miami VA

Wounded servicemen and women are cycling in Miami to spread their inspirational message of courage and hope. The brave men and women participating in this event are cycling in support of their injured comrades recovering in military hospitals across the country. All of the participants are provided the adaptive equipment they need to cycle though missing one or more limbs. The cyclists participating in this ride will also be cycling in Marathon Key February 17 and Key West on the 18.

The riders assembled in front of the Finnegan's Way Restaurant located at 1344 Ocean Drive. They arrived at 11:00 a.m. at the Miami VA Healthcare System



Soldier Ride veterans ride into the Miami VA

to a warm welcome of VA Staff, veterans and volunteers waving flags and chanting USA.

The soldiers proceeded to the T.C. Doherty Auditorium for a special ceremony which included two moving videos, a Welcome Home Ceremony by the Miami Vet Center, each soldier presented with a Quilt of Valor, letters of thanks and inspiration from Ms. Samuel's 5th grade

class at David Fairchild Elementary School and standing ovation for the Wounded Soldier Ride participants.

Soldier Ride is a non-profit organization that raises awareness and funds for our injured soldiers returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan. It's not about the war it's about the soldiers!



Quilt of Valor received by Soldier Ride veterans

Soldier Ride organizes cross country and local bicycle trips used as rehab opportunities for soldiers recovering from major injuries and also to raise awareness. Funds raised go out to such organizations as the Wounded Warrior Project (www.woundedwarriorproject.org). You can learn more about the group at www.soldierride.org

Announcing the Winner of Name Your Employee Newsletter Contest

Thanks to all the employees who submitted the "tropical theme" suggestions for the naming of the new Employee Newsletter for the Miami VA Healthcare System. Dr. Jane Mazzarella, primary care physician on the Blue Team was named the winner and received a \$25.00 gift certificate to the Miami VA Canteen.

Dr. Jane Mazzarella

Feeley Appointed to Senior VA Health Care Post

William F. Feeley, a native of Providence, R.I., was recently appointed Deputy Under Secretary of Health for Operations and Management for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA).

"Mr. Feeley has a long and distinguished VA career of health care management," said Dr. Jonathan Perlin, VA's Under Secretary for Health. "We are fortunate to have him assume this leadership role."

In his new post, Feeley will manage the VA health care system's 21 regions and their 154 hospitals, 875 outpatient clinics, 136 nursing home care units and 207 Vet Centers. Feeley had been the director of VA's health care network in upstate New York since March 2003.

VA is the largest integrated health care system in the country, with a health care budget of about \$30 billion, 196,000 health care professionals and 1,300 sites of care.

Feeley's VA career began in 1975. He was among a small group of senior federal executives in 2003 and 2005 who received the prestigious President's Rank Award for a long-term commitment to excellence. One of his major VA accomplishments was developing a customer service program that solicits feedback from veterans and their families about their perceptions of VA care.

A native of Providence, R.I., Feeley holds a bachelor's degree in sociology from Providence College and a master's degree in social work from Boston University. He is a fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives.

National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans



Above: Mari Wilensky, Miss Florida 2005 is greeted by Bruce McManus and other members of the Vietnam Veterans of America Chapter 121



Left: Letty DeJesus, Voluntary Service Specialist introduces Zach Thomas of the Miami Dolphins to veteran Tony Lopez during the National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans program on February 14, 2006.

Miami VA Healthcare System Officer Peter Domoracki presented the Secretary's Valor Award

The story in Officer Domoracki's own Words:

I was attending the VA Law Enforcement Training Center, Basic Police Officer Course in Little Rock, AR; when Katrina struck New Orleans (and later my own home in Delray Beach, FL) I was just a few days away from graduation and like most I wanted to get back home. Then the director of the VA L.E.T.C. (Mr. Angel and Mr. Price) came to the class and explained the difficult situation the VA New Orleans was in, they explained that since we were within driving distance (6hrs) from New Orleans they wanted volunteers to go along with their staff to lend assistance. I volunteered. We were the 1st ones there to relieve the Officers from the New Orleans VA who were completely exhausted. I knew the instant I saw them that I had done the right thing. We aided in the evacuation of the patients, staff and family members who stayed in the facility as

a shelter. After the hospital was empty of all patients, staff and family members it went from a rescue mission to a security mission. We secured the facility until replacements started to rotate in.

Unbeknownst to me I was later selected to receive the Secretary's Hero Award. It was quite an honor and I truly felt very special being given all the attention at the Award Ceremony in Washington DC. I was given a framed certificate (The award for Valor) a crystal trophy inscribed with my name and a Lapel Pin stating I was the recipient of the Secretary's Hero Award. The Certificate was presented to me by The Honorable Secretary Nicholson at the ceremony which took place at the VA Headquarters in Washington DC. It was a memorable experience and one I will never forget.

Best Regards,
Officer Peter Domoracki
Miami VA Healthcare System



VA Secretary R. James Nicholson presents Valor Award to Officer Peter Domoracki

Customer Comment Corner

What our customers are saying about our service to our veterans

Thank you for hosting the SFHHA meeting today and sharing the cutting edge strategies employed by the Miami VA Healthcare System. What can I say...WOW!!!! Please thank each of the presenters and staff who took time to share their knowledge and expertise. The dedication, thoughtfulness and expertise of your staff and leaders were evident throughout each of the presentations.

Thank you too for flawlessly orchestrating the logistics of the meeting. From your warm welcome in the ED parking lot through introductions and arrangements for presenters, everything was perfect.

You and the staff should rightly feel proud of all you have accomplished and the care you are providing to our veterans. (Vicariously, you made me feel very proud of what we are doing for our vets.)

I hope I have the opportunity sometime in the future of visiting again and exploring in greater detail the performance improvement efforts which you have employed to improve the quality and safety of patient care.

Again, thank you.

Michael Jarema
Corporate Director of Accreditation Readiness
Baptist Health South Florida

On behalf of my father, WWII veteran John P. Ryan, I would like to thank you, and others at the Oakland Park VA Outpatient Clinic.

We were greeted by a charming volunteer, who politely requested photo ID's for issuance of guest passes. As we entered, I dropped the sun glass clips from my glasses, and became tangled in

my cellphone cord. A departing veteran, whom I would approximate to be in his seventies, rushed to pick them up for me...truly a gallant man! Walking into the reception area, we chose to ask for guidance from a gentleman at the information desk. Although he was engaged in a business telephone call, he asked the caller to hold a moment, and directed us with a kind smile to follow the blue line.

Arriving at the reception desk, the lovely gal took my father's name and social and asked us to be seated. I asked her if she might be able to let you know that I was in the building, and she said she would call you.

Not three minutes later, we were called in to meet with a lovely nurse named Linda. Smiling and chatting amiably, she was knowledgeable, patient and truly a pleasure. At the conclusion of our time with her, Linda directed us to meet with Dr. Sharma. Dad loved Linda's smile!

Dr. Sharma was efficient, fun, and highly proficient. My father immediately respected her, because it was obvious she respected him. She was most gracious as she conducted her questions and exam. When we left Dr. Sharma, and were leaving, the gal at the reception desk actually walked us to your office...which is when we saw you in the hallway. I did not have the opportunity to thank that young woman, but hope you will forward this to her.

From beginning to end, Dad's visit was wonderful. The sensitivity and respect displayed by staff and volunteers was incredible. Respect for scheduled appointments, respect for time, and personal respect for an elderly gentleman abounded.

My father commented that everything should be run as efficiently as the VA and as we departed, he purchased a ball cap from a volunteer to support the Veterans. I could not agree more with my father, and private sector medical providers could, or rather should, take a lesson from your organization.

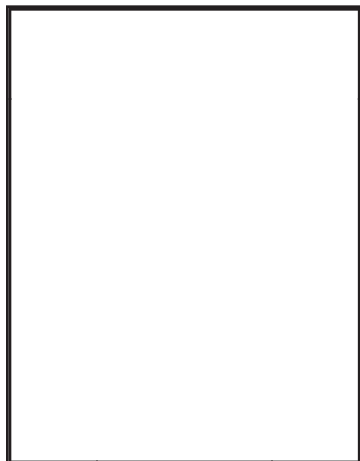
In short, although it may sound corny, our visit made me very proud to be an American and the daughter of a serviceman. Our most sincere thanks to you, and the wonderful Blue Team at the VA.

All the Very Best,
Patricia (Pejay) Ryan

Have you observed a VA employee providing GREAT customer service?

Starting in March, 2006, every patient, visitor and employee will be able to recognize employees who provide excellent customer service.

"Dedicated to Customer Service Excellence" cards will be readily available throughout the Medical Center and the Community Based Outpatient Clinics. The cards will request information on the employee and a brief description of the event where exceptional customer service was displayed. Just fill out the card and give it to the employee being recognized. The employee will redeem the card at the Customer Service Office (1D-165) for a VISN 8 logo item. Once a quarter, the Customer Service Committee will hold a drawing and 5 winners will receive a \$100.00 cash award.



Sample Customer Service Card

VA and HHS to Target Diabetes, Obesity among American Veterans

With obesity and deadly diabetes at significantly higher levels among America's veterans, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have announced a coordinated campaign to educate veterans and their families about ways to combat these health issues.

"Inactive lifestyles and unhealthy eating habits can cause needless suffering for America's veterans," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Obesity and diabetes are major threats to the health and lifestyles of our veterans, deserving a robust campaign to better educate them on healthy habits."

Veterans are more likely than the general population to have diabetes, one of the major complications associated with being overweight.

According to the American Diabetes Association, 7 percent of the U.S. population has diabetes, and the rate increases with age. Among veterans receiving VA health care, who are on average older than the general population, the rate is 20 percent.

"Central to our goal of controlling the cost of health care is the promotion of wellness, fitness and the prevention of chronic disease.

We are working to encourage Americans to adopt a healthy lifestyle and to take responsibility for making wise choices to improve their fitness and health," said HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt.

In a news conference here today, Secretary Nicholson, HHS Secretary Leavitt, Surgeon General Dr. Richard H. Carmona and VA Under Secretary for Health Dr. Jonathan B. Perlin announced the start of a campaign called "HealthierUS Veterans" - a multi-pronged educational effort to spawn healthy eating and physical activity among veterans, their families and members of their communities.

VA medical centers will promote nutrition and exercise with local groups in 40 communities that receive grants from HHS in a program called "Steps to a HealthierUS."

"Our service men and women are known for their extraordinarily high levels of fitness," said Perlin. "We want our veterans to be identified the same way."

Overweight patients receiving VA health care may participate in weight loss programs tailored to their needs. They may also receive pedometers, diet advisories and "prescriptions" suggesting how much to walk -- or, in the case of wheelchair users, how much to roll.

The two secretaries also plan to kick off regional educational campaigns this spring in four cities where VA and HHS Steps programs collaborate.

Local celebrities and members of veterans service organizations will be invited to participate.

In May, the "HealthierUS Veterans" program will participate with the President's Council on Physical Fitness during the council's annual rally in Washington.

VA Receives "Public Spirit Award" for Hurricane Aid

Agency Cited as Example of a "True Success Story"

The efforts of employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in the wake of destruction by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita were further recognized Monday when the Department received the prestigious Public Spirit Award from the American Legion Auxiliary.

The annual award was accepted on behalf of the Department by the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs, who also lauded VA employees for their heroic sacrifice during Hurricane Katrina, which struck the Gulf Coast six months ago.

"My VA colleagues responded to that epic tragedy with selflessness and heroism," said Nicholson in accepting the award. "VA employees acted heroically even in the face of catastrophic personal loss."

The Public Spirit Award is historically given to individuals, but American Legion Auxiliary National President Carol Van Kirk nominated the entire Department for being what she called "an example of a true success story."

The award from the American Legion Auxiliary follows earlier recognition for VA's response to Hurricane Katrina, including Senate Resolution 263, a commendation to agency employees for their efforts during the storm.

Past recipients of the Public Spirit Award include Ronald Reagan, Madeleine Albright and Colin Powell.

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